

# THE SIXTY-YEAR-OLD COMMUNIST MOVEMENT OF INDIA — A MARXIST REVIEW

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[1]

In late 1973, a few weeks before his death, I went to meet Kakababu, as Muzaffar Ahmad had come to be called since his underground days during the late thirties and early forties. It was one of my usual visits which turned out to be a significant one by the time it ended. During our conversation, Kakababu expressed grave doubt about whether he had been able to build up what he wanted to do all his life — a party, communist not only in name but also in reality. I had heard him express more or less similar doubts in his earlier discussions too, so I was neither surprised nor shocked at what he said. However, I was overwhelmed by his voice. It came out like a sigh from the depth of his heart. It was indeed deeply touching to see a stalwart like him taking stock of his life's work and feeling that there was so much still to be done but that there was hardly any time left for it.

The question was, why were these doubts expressed by no less a person than Kakababu, who founded and nurtured not just the Communist Party of India in his thirties but also the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in his seventies? What are the elements essential to a Communist Party that are absent or nearly so in these two parties? At the same time, what are the elements alien to a Communist Party that are present, and may even be dominant in the C.P.I. or the C.P.I.(M)? Most importantly, how have they impacted the two? The eventual question that lingers is — has it still managed to remain a Communist Party despite these deficiencies and intrusions, and if so, how long will it succeed in doing so?

In fact, the Communist Party of India - both in its original version and its revised edition – is a party of paradoxes. It is a working-class party with a petty-bourgeois composition, both in its leadership and in its membership! It is wedded to Marxism-Leninism but is in an illicit relationship with Social Democracy, sometimes overt, sometimes covert! The Party is a monolithic organisation ridden with cliques and factions, each trying to capture the positions of power at the expense of the others! It is a sixty-year-old political party with the maturity of an adolescent! It is an All-India Party with a physical presence in a few isolated states! Last of all, the Party appears to be developing while in reality, it is disintegrating! It is in the understanding of

these seemingly opposite positions that the answer to the above questions lies.

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As is well known to any student of Socialism, Marx and Engels envisaged the Socialist Revolution in an independent and capitalistically advanced country that had not only gone through the Democratic Revolution and the developing phase of capitalism but had also entered deep into its declining phase. Hence, they envisaged the growth and development of the Communist Party, its role in organizing workers as a class-conscious army, and leading it to accomplish its historical task of achieving the Socialist Revolution and establishing Socialism. In the capitalistically advanced country of Marx-Engels' vision, Society would be divided into two classes - the bourgeoisie and the proletariat or the industrial working class. The working class would constitute the overwhelming majority of the population and would be adequately equipped both culturally and psychologically. This class will not only lead its own party to the successful accomplishment of the Socialist Revolution but also to replace the bourgeois state with its own state, conduct its affairs, and manage all the establishments, institutions and organizations – political, economic, scientific, technological, cultural and educational. Thus, the Communist Party would be the party of the working class, by the working class for the working class.

Lenin, decades later, felt that in view of the transformation of Capitalism into Imperialism, from a national system to a world system, classical Marxism required to be extended and concluded that it is no longer true to insist that the Socialist Revolution could take place only in a capitalistically advanced country; it could also take place in a capitalistically backward country. In fact, it could and would take place in the country that represented the weakest link in the chain of world imperialism. It follows, therefore, that the Socialist Revolution can take place where the working class is still numerically a minority and culturally backward. In such a country, it is those sections of the educated and culturally advanced sections of the petty-bourgeoisie that have accepted Marxism-Leninism, dedicated themselves to the cause of the working class and, through conscious and ceaseless efforts, had got themselves identified with the working class, who would found the Communist Party. They would make the workers class conscious and draw them into the party, which in due course lead the working class, the peasantry and the petty-bourgeoisie, first in the struggle for democratic Revolution and thereafter in the struggle for Socialist Revolution. Thus the Communist Party in such a

country would be a party of the working class only ideologically but of the class-conscious workers and the declassed petty-bourgeoisie physically.

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In India, as in other underdeveloped countries, Communist Party was founded by petty-bourgeois youths led by Muzaffar Ahmad and S. A. Dange, themselves petty-bourgeois. But there was a difference and a very important one at that. As Kakababu himself in his characteristic modesty noted, "In other countries, the founders of the Communist Party were giant intellectuals ~ Plekhanov in Russia, Chen-tu-shin in China. Though they themselves left the Party subsequently, they left behind in the Party giant intellectuals. Plekhanov gave Lenin to the Party; Chen-tu-shin gave Mao-tse-tung. It is your misfortune. that the task of founding the party in India had to be undertaken by myself and Dange. None of us was a giant intellectual. As a result, the ideological base of the Party has continued to be immature."

We pay our homage to Kakababu and his Comrades-in-arms for undertaking and accomplishing the task that confronted them. It is not the predecessors like them who are to account for this continuing immaturity in the ideological field; it is their successors who have to account for this. We are aware that none of them individually was or is equal to the task but could not or cannot they collectively undertake and accomplish the task? Neither did they attempt it then nor will they attempt it now. On the contrary, steeped in petty-bourgeois weaknesses and vices, they have prevented enthusiastic and more or less capable junior comrades from undertaking the task — from organising party schools and imparting Marxist Leninist education to younger comrades. Had they been allowed to do so, not only would have the learners changed but the teachers also would have changed — from petty-bourgeois intellectuals to proletarian intellectuals, from less class-conscious workers to more class-conscious workers. "Man changes Nature; while changing Nature, he changes himself." The declassed petty-bourgeois teacher teaches and changes the non-class-conscious worker and while teaching and changing the latter, the former learns and changes himself. As a result, the ideological basis of the party would have matured and the ideological level of the membership would have improved.

The Communist Party does not emerge as a ready-made finished product, worthy of the role it has to play and fulfil. Initially a petty-bourgeois party, it goes through quantitative changes and in due course gets itself transformed through a qualitative change into a proletarian party. If the process is not allowed to operate, the petty-bourgeois party not only continues to remain

petty-bourgeois, it deteriorates — both ideologically and organisationally till it is confronted and challenged, removed and replaced by a genuine Communist Party. Genuine not just in the colour of the flag but in the character of its membership, including of course, the leadership.

Lenin insisted that a party in order that it could become a genuine Communist Party must be very strict in recruiting its member; only the class-conscious workers and declassed elements of the petty-bourgeois and other classes should be admitted to membership and for that candidates should not only have some experience of class and/or mass struggles but also have Marxist education; whereas in the case of a worker-candidate more emphasis should be laid on experience, in the case of a petty-bourgeois candidate more emphasis should be laid on education. Lenin insisted that in order that it could grow and develop into a genuine Communist Party, the Party must function on the basis of Democratic Centralism; no policy decision should be imposed from above, it should be induced from below; a policy proposal made by the leadership should be sent down to lower and still lower units till it reaches the lowest units, wherefrom it would be sent back to upper and still upper units till it reached the highest leadership, incorporating the suggestions made at every level; it was after carefully discussing these suggestions that the leadership should take the final decision and make obligatory on all concerned. Lenin insisted that in order that the Communist Party could function properly and improve its functioning ceaselessly, it must encourage and organise criticism and self-criticism, purge itself periodically of members turned inactive or gone astray, admit new members into it and continuously educate and re-educate its membership. "Theory without practice is barren. Practice without theory is blind." It is only by strictly adhering to the above-mentioned Leninist lessons that a petty-bourgeois party can transform itself into a working-class party and fulfil its historical role.

In our country, these Leninist norms and forms have long been forgotten. The decision, adopted in the early fifties, to develop the class party into a mass party opened the door to one and all. The Leninist precondition of education and experience for admission to membership was thrown to the winds. Democratic centralism was reduced to anarchic democracy in the C.P.I. and to autocratic centralism in the C.P.I.(M). The principles of criticism and self-criticism were unceremoniously abandoned. The situation went from bad to worse day by day till it reached the worst in 1971 when a Polit Bureau member of the C.P.I.(M) had the unabashed audacity to announce in the state conference in presence of the other Polit Bureau members including the General Secretary, "Comrades, you talk of Leninist norms and forms I do not

blame you as you have never gone outside of the four walls of this country, But I had been to many places but nowhere, I say nowhere, in the world are those norms and forms observed. Gone are the days of Lenin; gone are those norms and forms.” And so we witness today in India the Communist Party both in its original version and in its revised edition, in the present predicament. Instead of growing into a party of class-conscious workers and the declassed petty-bourgeois, it has degenerated into a conglomeration of declassed workers and the class-conscious petty-bourgeois!

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During the first two decades and a half of its six-decade existence, the future of the communist Party under the leadership of Kakababu and his comrades-in-arms appeared to be promising. Conscious efforts were made and substantial measures were taken to grow and develop the Party into a genuinely Communist party through restricted recruitment, Marxist Leninist education, participation in struggles, adherence to the principles of democratic centralism, criticism and self-criticism and periodic purges. Recurring imperialist attacks on the Party in all possible forms - conspiracy cases, long-term sentences, ruthless repression, imposition of ban - however, did not allow the Party to function smoothly and uninterruptedly. So the efforts made and steps taken to grow and develop the Party had to be discontinued repeatedly and resumed irregularly as and when the opportunity presented itself. It is obvious that so important a task could not be accomplished under the condition prevailing during those years.

Anyway what little could be done, did not go in vain. It yielded a fairly good harvest. It is the communist Party that first demanded complete independence in 1921 and defined it in concrete terms in its manifesto and programme issued in 1921 and 1926 respectively. It is the Communist Party that taught the people that neither terrorism nor ‘Satyagraha’ could deliver the goods, that only a revolutionary struggle of people could bring India freedom and independence. It is the Communist Party again that infused class consciousness into the workers and peasants and led them in their class struggles. It is again the Communist Party that inspired them with the message of socialism. But it was during the most difficult years of the Second World War that the best in the Communist Party was revealed in all its glory.

The membership of the Party in 1941 was less than four thousand in a population of more than forty crores scattered over such a vast sub-continent. It was indeed moving to see with what courage and conviction, sacrifice and dedication only four thousand communists confronting the most difficult

situation created by the Jap-Fascist aggression, British Imperialist intransigence, Congress leadership's bewilderment, angry youth's wild fury, British-made Bengal famine, British-engineered communal frenzy. Not only did the communists succeed in mobilising large sections of the working class, peasantry and the petty-bourgeoisie for the anti-fascist struggle but also in preparing for the final bid for power. The Trade Union Congress, the Kishan Sabha and the Students' Federation made unprecedented headway. The newly founded Kishore Bahini, Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti, the Anti-Fascist Writers' Association and the Indian People's Theatre Association progressed at a breathtaking pace. The Communist Party itself developed from less than 4000 in 1941 to more than 40,000 in 1946 in the course of only five years. It was under the leadership of the Communist Party that a new phase of the freedom struggle began — the phase of workers' strikes, peasants' struggles, students' and women's demonstrations and, above all, mutinies in the navy, army and air force — the mutineers and striking workers united in a militant fraternity against Imperialism.

But even during these twenty-five years, the Party was not free from deviations and departures from Marxism-Leninism. Its petty-bourgeois class character and ideological immaturity found expression in wrong political lines from time to time. For example, according to Marxism-Leninism, in the period of imperialism i.e. moribund capitalism, until and unless the working class could dislodge the bourgeoisie from the leadership of the national movement, the country could not achieve real independence or complete the Democratic Revolution, so the task of the working class was to replace the bourgeois leadership by its own leadership. But the Communist Party had never tried to do that; on the contrary, it had repeatedly appealed to the bourgeois leadership of the Congress to lead the struggle. Then, during the War, it urged the Congress leadership and the League leadership to unite and lead the people in the war against Fascism and Imperialism. Yes, they did unite but not against Fascism and Imperialism but against Communism! Besides, the Communist Party also committed deviations in formulating the tactical line and translating it into practice. Thus, but for the leftist departure in the early thirties, the Communist Party generally made rightist deviations from Marxism-Leninism. But despite all these deviations and departures, the 1942 - 47 period appears to be the most glorious period in the life of the Communist Party.

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Then followed the reaction from rightism to leftism, nay, even to extreme leftism. Unable to comprehend the significance of the transfer of power in the

radically changed situation of the forces of Socialism and National Liberation having got stronger than the forces of Imperialism and Colonialism, the Communist Party leadership raised the slogan, "This freedom is fake!" ("Yeh Azadi jhoota hai") and called upon the people to rise in arms for achieving genuine freedom and completing the Democratic Revolution, nay, even Socialist Revolution, as the leadership committed the ultra-left Trotskyite deviation of the Democratic Revolution having got intermingled with the Socialist Revolution. This ideological Trotskyism was accompanied by organisational Trotskyism also and Democratic Centralism was replaced by Autocratic Centralism; elected committees were replaced by nominated committees; in the name of proletarianising the Party; immature worker-cadres were made Secretaries, only to be used as dummies by the petty bourgeois assistants. For a Communist Party leadership, to bid farewell to Marxism-Leninism and to entertain and embrace Trotskyism was not only a deviation but also a crime. And the Party had to pay a very high price for this crime. Hundreds of comrades were killed or disabled for life; thousands were tortured in jails and countless people were made to suffer in so many ways. In fact, the party was completely disrupted and all but destroyed.

Thereafter, a Party delegate managed a secret journey to the Soviet Union and a secret return too. It produced before the Party a draft Programme, reportedly prepared in collaboration with Soviet Indologists and approved by Stalin, and got it accepted by the general membership with some amendments here and there. In a few days, it was discovered to the sorrow and surprise of all that the document was self-contradictory, the characterisation of the Congress government contradicting the delineation of its foreign policy, and the document was set aside without fuss. Then started an inner-party struggle between two trends, the Rightist and the Leftist trends, the former holding that the Congress government was a progressive government and should be supported and the latter holding that it was a reactionary government and should be opposed. The struggle went on up to 1960 when the two trends crystallised into two organisations within the same party and ultimately into two parties in 1961, though the formalisation of the split took place in 1964.

From 1961 to 1966, the country witnessed with admiration another period of glory, this time not in the life of the undivided Party but in the life of the newly established party i.e. the Communist Party of India (Marxist). In a most critical situation, full of dangerous potentialities when India and China were at war with each other, almost all the front-rank C.P.I.(M) leaders were thrown into jails, government repression was at its worst and chauvinist frenzy was at its

boiling point, a small number of Communists, led by second rank leaders, confronted the situation with incredible courage and conviction, utmost selflessness and dedication. Clandestine literature in large quantities was printed and distributed, a legal weekly newspaper was brought out. A network of organisations was set up and, in due course, class and mass struggles were launched which culminated in the 72-hour general strike, a record still unbeaten. As a result of the strike the leaders were released from the jails. They took over the reins of the Party but slowly yet steadily drove the Party into the bourgeois boulevard of pleasant parliamentarianism, and to suppress the discontent brewing inside the Party established unabashedly autocratic centralism. This led to an ultra-left revolt, the emergence of Naxalites and the establishment of the C.P.I.(M-L) which in course of time has become fragmented into so many groups.

The C.P.I., on the other hand, presumably following the instructions of the Soviet Party, went on supporting the Congress government shamelessly on each and every issue including even the Emergency. Discontent started brewing within the Party; indiscipline became rampant and anarchic democracy without even a semblance of centralism turned the Party into a go-as-you-like garden gathering. Recently the leadership trying to restore the Communist image of the Party has turned a bit left, resulting again in another split and setting up of a new party, the All India Communist Party. People are yet to see how many fragments it is reduced to in course of time.

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Such is then the situation of Communism in India, as represented by the C.P.I. and the C.P.I.(M). To sum up:

1. The Communist Party of India, neither in its old original version nor its new revised edition, is a Marxist-Leninist Party; either in ideology, or organisation, or in composition;
2. In ideology, it is not only immature, it is non-proletarian as well; it is petty-bourgeois;
3. In organisation, it is not only non-Leninist, it is anti Leninist; Democratic centralism has been replaced by Anarchic Democracy in the C.P.I. and by Autocratic Centralism in the C.P.I.(M); While the former is a 'go-as-you-like' garden gathering, the latter is a 'do-as-I-guide' robot-rally;

4. In composition, it is not only non-proletarian, it is predominantly petty-bourgeois, all the leaders and the over-whelming majority of the members are petty-bourgeois in origin and are still petty-bourgeois in outlook;

In fine, instead of growing into a party of the working class i.e. of the class-conscious workers and the declassed petty-bourgeois, it has degenerated into a party of the petty-bourgeois i.e. of the class-conscious petty-bourgeois and the declassed workers.